

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Curbside recycling suspended due to driver shortage

City of Chattanooga suspends curbside recycling to prevent driver shortage from impacting garbage and brush pick-up

Chattanooga, Tenn. (July 29, 2021) — The City of Chattanooga is suspending curbside recycling due to a worsening shortage of truck operators. The suspension will begin at the close of business on Friday.

The city's opt-in curbside recycling containers will no longer be collected until the city is able to fill a sufficient number of its 32 open CDL driver positions. The decision to suspend curbside recycling was made in order to ensure that there are enough drivers available to pick up garbage, which is required by law.

However, in spite of supervisors filling in on a regular basis, garbage and brush pick-up could also be impacted if the driver shortage continues to grow worse. Retirements, resignations, and sickness due to COVID-19 could play a role in continued service disruptions.

Tennessee residents interested in becoming a driver for the city may apply at agency.governmentjobs.com/chattanooga and browse open positions.

Chief of Staff Brent Goldberg said on Thursday that the city expects to increase pay for drivers and other essential workers in the upcoming budget, for both existing and new employees, in order to combat the ongoing worker shortage and resulting service impacts.

“The impact to recycling due to our driver shortage illustrates one of Chattanooga’s most acute problems: pay for city employees is far below the market rate, a problem our budget will address when we present it to City Council in August.” Goldberg said. “It is vital for the future of our city that we provide essential pay to our essential workers, or we risk additional impacts to our essential city services.”

In a public meeting this week, Goldberg alerted the City Council to potential service impacts from the disparity in pay between city workers and the private sector, which has crippled the city’s ability to attract and retain skilled workers. ‘Pay’ has been the most common factor cited in resignations or when applicants turn down a city position.

Goldberg has also warned about effects on the city’s fire and police response, such as increased response times to 911 calls, brownouts of fire stations, and limited or no response to requests for service deemed non-life threatening.

Residents are encouraged to make use of one of Chattanooga's five recycling drop-off locations, which are open seven days a week, excepting holidays. A list of frequently asked questions is attached to this news release, but residents may always call 311 at (423) 643-6311 with any additional questions.

City Recycle Centers:

- 5955 Brainerd Road
- 1250 E. 3rd Street
- 3189 Cummings Hwy
- 8004 Batters Place Road
- 4504 N. Access Road

Hours of Operation

- Monday-Friday 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday 9:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
- Sunday 1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Closed on the following holidays:

New Year's Day, Martin Luther King's Birthday (Third Monday in January), Good Friday, Easter, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Veteran's Day, Thanksgiving Day, Friday after Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, and Christmas Day

Frequently Asked Questions:

- *Can I use my blue recycle container for an extra garbage container?*

No, recycle containers should only be used for clean recycling materials. Garbage crews will not service recycle containers.

- *What can I do with the recycled material that I currently have?*

Clean recycling such as paper, plastic bottles, aluminum cans, cardboard, and brown, green, and clear glass can be taken to the City's five recycle centers which are open 7 days a week. See above for a list of locations.

- *Will the City ever reinstate the curbside recycling program?*

Yes, this is only a temporary suspension of the program. The City will continue to promote environmental sustainability through education and outreach.

- *Will my taxes decrease since recyclables are not being collected curbside?*

No, the City will continue to sustain the components of our recycling program such as the 5 recycling centers, disposal of recyclable materials, fleet, and education and outreach.

- *What do we do with our recycle containers?*

Residents should keep their recycling containers. Curbside recycling will be reinstated. However, residents may also call 311 to have their containers picked up.

- *Why was this decision made?*

This was a difficult decision. An increasing shortage of drivers, low employee retention, and hiring challenges are just a few of the issues that made continued curbside recycling untenable.

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